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MARINE CORPS LEADERSHIP:
EMPOWERING OR LIMITING THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL?

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Executive Summary

Title: Marine Corps Leadership: Empowering or limiting the Strategic Corporal?

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Thesis: It is clear the Marine Corps empowers the strategic corporal in many ways. However, Marine Corps leadership limits the strategic corporal in three ways: zero-defects, micromanagement, and misuse of the word 'risk.' The Marine Corps should remedy this situation by improving leadership and inculcating a better sense of personal responsibility in each Marine.

Discussion: The strategic corporal defines the type of Marine required for success in future warfare. General Charles Krulak, former Commandant of the Marine Corps, described three steps for training the strategic corporal: instilling character, providing a commitment to lifelong learning, and leadership. Currently, the Marine Corps is carrying out the first two steps well, but is not doing as well with the third step, specifically with respect to command climate. General Krulak explained that leadership quality may be viewed through a unit's command climate. Commanders should not allow a zero-defects mentality or micromanagement to exist. Unfortunately, a zero-defects mentality and sense of micromanagement do exist in the Marine Corps and have led to more centralized decision making than seen ten years ago. Centralized decision making appears to exist to improve force protection and has resulted in a desire to mitigate risks. Although the intentions are good, the rhetoric regarding risk is clouding the issue of force protection because only symptoms are being discussed and not the disease. Many studies, articles, and real world examples have been examined in this paper to determine unintended consequences of overly prescriptive decisions that hamper the Marine Corps' development of strategic corporals. Some unintended consequences include a zero-defects mentality that persists in the name of safety, micromanagement found in garrison, and overuse of the word 'risk.' The atmosphere created by zero-defects, micromanagement, and risk aversion make it difficult to transform the population that make up the strategic corporal—the Millennial Generation—into creative and independent decision makers.

Conclusion: It is imperative that the Marine Corps continue to recruit strong men and women from society and then develop them into strategic corporals. The primary hindrances to this development are a zero-defects mentality, micromanagement, and misuse of the word 'risk.' Senior leaders should enforce common sense rules and regulations that have been successful in maintaining a morally strong Corps instead of implementing new directives that are intended to improve force protection but in reality only address symptoms. The solution is to develop better leadership in all Marines and to instill a strong sense of personal responsibility within each Marine.

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There is a debate within the American military involving active duty service members, pundits, theorists, and retirees about what to call future wars. Some of the more popular descriptions include the fourth generation of warfare, irregular warfare, and even hybrid warfare. This debate has also highlighted concerns over how to develop young men and women to be successful on the battlefield. If future wars cannot be defined, how will the military train its leaders in preparation? General Charles Krulak provided an answer to this question ten years ago as the Commandant of the Marine Corps. First, he coined the phrase "three block war" to describe future wars involving America. This description transcends all other naming conventions currently used to illustrate war. He also coined the phrase "strategic corporal" to characterize the type of leader the military must create to be successful in the three block war.

General Krulak describes the strategic corporal's participation in the three block war as:

Success or failure [in the three block war] will rest, increasingly, with the individual Marine on the ground-and with his or her ability to make the right decision, at the right time, while under extreme duress. Without direct supervision, young Marines will be required to make rapid, well-reasoned, independent decisions while facing a bewildering array of challenges and threats. These decisions will be subject to the harsh scrutiny of both the media and the court of public opinion. In many cases, the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy. His or her actions may not only influence the immediate tactical situation, but have operational and strategic implications as well. If we accept the maxim "battles are won and lost [first] in the mind of the commanders," we can safely assume that the three block war may very well be won or lost in the minds of our "strategic corporals."¹

Due to the level of importance placed upon the strategic corporal for America's future success in war, this begs the question, "How is the Marine Corps doing in developing the strategic corporal?" This paper will examine where the strategic corporal originates and how the Marine Corps currently develops him. First, this will be done by reviewing the traits and beliefs held by the current generation filling the lower ranks of the service. Next, current leadership practices

within the Marine Corps will be examined, which will include evaluating General Krulak's steps toward developing the strategic corporal. Finally, a review of how decisions are made on the battlefield will be examined to determine if the Marine Corps is achieving the desired end state for the strategic corporal, which is to create competent decision makers. In the end, it will be clear the Marine Corps is doing some things very well, but not doing other things well, and in particular needs to minimize any perception of a zero-defects mentality, reduce micromanagement, and quantify risk.

THE MILLENNIALS ARE COMING

When General Krulak first introduced the strategic corporal, Generation X comprised the population of young recruits and candidates. In an interview in 1998, General Krulak remarked how he loves Generation X. He explained that they were an untapped resource the nation was wasting. Subsequently, he redirected recruiting efforts to focus on what would appeal to Generation X and the results were tremendous.² Ten years later, a new generation is entering the Corps. Today, the majority of young Marines are from Generation Y, also called the Millennial Generation. The distinction between the two generations is important because they have very different values and views on life. To continue transforming young men and women into Marines, the Marine Corps must understand the differences between these two generations. To complicate matters, there are currently three distinct generations in the Marine Corps. The Baby Boomers comprise the majority of senior officer and enlisted positions, Generation X comprise the majority of field grade and senior company grade officers and junior staff non-commissioned positions, and finally Generation Y is beginning to comprise the majority of junior officer and enlisted billets which include the strategic corporal.

“The Baby Boomers are considered those born between 1943 and 1960 while Generation Xers were born between 1960 and 1980. Different researchers have adjusted these dates five or six years in either direction. Generational differences emerge as cohorts experience defining moments in history which shape their attitudes and perspectives.”³ The Boomers were shaped by periods of economic prosperity and attitudes of defiance and intemperance. “Vietnam, Woodstock, the Kennedy assassination, and Kent State”⁴ were key events in their lives. Their fathers worked and their mothers mostly remained at home. Eventually they entered adulthood confident and purposeful. The influence of personal goals resulted in work ethics that placed families on the back burner. Finally, day care and nannies enabled both boomer parents to enter the work force.⁵

“Generation X did not receive the attention heaped on the Boomers. Generation X is sometimes referred to as Slackers, Baby Busters, or the MTV Generation. They developed a cynical, pragmatic, survivor mentality as they experienced a world much less idyllic than their Boomer predecessors.”⁶ There are two dramatic factors that influenced Generation X children. First, divorce rates of boomers increased significantly resulting in “over 40% of Generation X children living in single-parent homes by age 16.”⁷ Second, as boomer women increasingly entered the work force, Generation X children became latchkey children and had to rely upon themselves. Thus, Generation X developed a cynical view of authority as the very people who were supposed to support them frequently disappointed them.⁸

The Millennial Generation, considered those born between 1980 and 2000, appears to be poised to reverse youth trend expectations by “not seeking to tear down institutions, but instead attempt to restore, rebuild, repair, replace and renovate institutions or invent new institutions that will promote the common good.”⁹ Additionally, the Millennial Generation grew up in a world

where zero tolerance became a method of fighting crime, drug abuse, and sexual promiscuity. The philosophy worked as drug rates, teenage alcohol abuse, and the numbers of sexually active high school students dropped.¹⁰ “As a result, the Millennial Generation is the most controlled generation in decades, and they seem to be excelling academically and behaviorally because of it.”¹¹ The Millennial Generation’s parents have been dubbed helicopter parents because of their incessant hovering over their children.¹² Finally, the Millennial’s values and beliefs of team cooperation, trust of authorities, academic success, and behavioral patterns make them suitable for recruitment into the military.¹³

Dr. Leonard Wong, a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel working for the Army’s Strategic Studies Institute, wrote an essay in 2002 entitled *Stifled Innovation? Developing Tomorrow’s Leaders Today* in which he summarized the four major differences between Generation X and the Millennials as: 1) Millennials are not pessimists, 2) Millennials are not self-absorbed, 3) Millennials are not distrustful, and 4) The Millennial Generation was not neglected like Generation X.¹⁴ Additionally, Dr. Wong concluded, “This new cohort of officers [the Millennials] is being welcomed into an Army that is extremely supervised, highly structured, very centralized, and exceptionally busy—the wrong environment needed to transform fledgling leaders accustomed to structure into innovative, creative, out-of-the-box thinkers.”¹⁵ Dr. Wong’s study examined the Army. Does the Marine Corps also fit his description of the current training environment? The short answer is yes and examples will be provided later in the paper when the current command climate is discussed. With a better understanding of what type of person is joining the military, let us evaluate how the Marine Corps takes a young man or woman and develops a strategic corporal.

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL

General Krulak explained the three steps for developing the strategic corporal: instilling character in the young Marine, encouraging an institutional commitment to lifelong professional development, and leadership.¹⁶ The first step, instilling character, begins with the young adults being recruited into the Marine Corps. The general characteristics of the Millennial Generation were already described, so here the discussion will focus on how the Marine Corps markets itself to be attractive for potential service members. General Krulak began the transformation of recruiting the right people immediately after he assumed responsibilities as the Commandant. "Our recruiting slogans said we would give them money, teach them a skill, and do this and that. They are not interested in this. They want to be challenged. They are joiners and want to be part of a clique, a fraternity, or a gang."¹⁷ General Krulak then initiated changes to commercials the Marine Corps used to reach the American public. The message focused on highlighting mental and moral challenges only a few could overcome to earn the title Marine.¹⁸ This effort was very successful and resulted in the Marine Corps achieving its recruiting goals during a period when other services failed to do so.

The recruiting trend General Krulak began continues today. Currently, the Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) uses the term "elite warrior" as its brand expression. Elite warrior is defined by MCRC as, "The Marine Corps and the individual Marine should be viewed as the epitome of military virtue. A group of smart, tough warriors who gain strength of mind, body, and character through membership in an elite and proud Corps."¹⁹ Additionally, the Marine Corps continues to utilize professional assistance in maximizing efforts to recruit the right person to become a Marine. John Eighmey, the Mithun Chair in Advertising at the University of Minnesota, produced a brief for the 2004 USMC Recruitment Advertising Campaign Conference

entitled *Youth Beliefs and the Propensity to Enlist*. "For youth seriously considering military service, beliefs relating to the propensity to enlist in the Marines center on the belief areas of fidelity, readiness and structure."²⁰ By combining this information and the personality traits of the Millennial Generation, it is clear the Marine Corps is recruiting the right people for the future. Another important consideration about today's recruits is that they know they are likely to go to war.

Once Marine recruits arrive at Parris Island or San Diego, or Quantico for officers, they are immersed in tough training that pushes them mentally and physically. Commandants since General Krulak have continued emphasizing the development of young leaders, both mentally and physically. The most dramatic and widespread policy post-Krulak came from former Commandant General James Jones. General Jones' contribution was the advent of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program. This program is focused on continuing the development of Marines through challenging training that emphasizes character and moral decision making along with combative techniques. The Marine Corps has made it clear that just teaching martial arts techniques is akin to training a bully. However, the techniques only comprise one third of the program—the other two thirds are focused on mental toughness and character. For example, after each technique is taught, instructors discuss "tie-ins" that relate the technique just learned with a real-world ethical or moral dilemma that Marines have faced before. In this manner, Marines are continuously developed mentally, physically, and morally well after they complete recruit training.²¹

The next step in developing the strategic corporal is maintaining an institutional commitment to lifelong learning. The Marine Corps' stance on lifelong learning is clearly defined in Marine Corps Order 1553.4B, which states, "The Marine Corps philosophy is that

PME is a career long study of the foundations of the military profession. The Marine Corps PME program is a progressive learning system designed to educate Marines by-grade throughout their careers.”²² On an individual level, the Marine Corps continues to emphasize the Commandant’s Reading List. This is just one small example of the Commandant’s personal involvement to assist Marines of all ranks to determine what to read. At the organizational level, the Marine Corps maintains strict adherence to professional military education requirements for both officer and enlisted promotions. Additionally, the Marine Corps is committed to improving training in accordance with changed global threats. For example, before 9-11, the Marine Corps’ capstone exercise was the Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) at Twentynine Palms, CA. This exercise provided a very close-to-real-world experience for maximizing combined arms in conventional war. After Operation Iraqi Freedom-I concluded, the Marine Corps realized the CAX program would not adequately prepare Marines and Sailors for the new Support and Stability Operations (SASO) being conducted in Operation Iraqi Freedom-II. Therefore, the CAX program was changed to train units for SASO. Eventually the SASO program evolved. Based on real world lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, Exercise Mojave Viper was initiated in its stead. The importance of these three programs improving over time is a direct reflection of the commitment the Marine Corps has for fully training units before deployment into harm’s way.²³

The final step in developing the strategic corporal is through leadership. General Krulak has stated that leadership is the hard currency of the Marine Corps.²⁴ Because leadership encompasses many facets, the focus here will be on one of the most important indicators of good leadership: command climate. General Krulak stresses that in order to create a “culture” of intuitive decision making (which will be discussed later) within the Corps,

Commanders at all levels [need to] create within their units an atmosphere [or command climate] that encourages, not inhibits, their subordinates to make

decisions. Subordinates must be assured that their leaders will back them up when they make a poor tactical decision. Debriefs and critiques must challenge the subordinate's rationale, but not threaten his or her pride or dignity. This, of course, is not possible in a command where micromanagement or a "zero-defects mentality" is prevalent.²⁵

The three steps General Krulak described for developing strategic corporals has been a part of the Marine Corps for centuries. Today, the Marine Corps is doing well with the first two steps, but the third step, particularly command climate, requires a closer look.

COMMAND CLIMATE: ZERO-DEFECTS

The view that a zero-defects mentality exists within the Corps could be a potential problem for the Marine Corps. According to a recent survey of Marines²⁶ representing random MOSs, ranks, genders, and experience levels, more than half thought there was a zero-defects mentality within the Marine Corps. This is a significant problem considering the importance General Krulak placed on eliminating any thoughts of a zero-defects mentality and the fact that MCDP 1 states:

We must realize that errors by junior leaders stemming from over boldness are a necessary part of learning. We should deal with such errors leniently; there must be no "zero defects" mentality.²⁷

This begs the question, "Where did the zero-defects mentality come from?" The roots of the current zero-defects mentality may be attributed to many different sources. In 2000, Dr. Wong may have identified a root cause in his study for the Strategic Studies Institute when he compared Generation X with Baby Boomers. Dr. Wong discusses the unintended consequences of the military downsizing after the Gulf War, and, although his research focused on the Army, the lessons are also applicable to the Marine Corps. For example,

Eight years of downsizing affected the attitudes of the survivors—those officers left behind. Research in organizational behavior had well documented the detrimental effects on survivors as a consequence of drawing down an

organization. The Army as an organization was no exception. The psychological bond between officer survivors and the Army was weakened and redefined. As competition in the now trimmer Army became keener, a stifling atmosphere of perfection known as the "zero-defects mentality" along with notions of careerism emerged. This is the environment encountered by today's junior officers soon after commissioning.²⁸

Each reference to 'Army' could easily be replaced with 'Marine Corps' in the above passage because the Marine Corps went through a similar downsizing and the organizational behavior within the Army is similar to that of the Marine Corps.

Now that the Marine Corps has stabilized its personnel size, and will actually grow in the coming years, is it likely the zero-defects mentality will persist? In this author's view, the answer is yes. The current focus of zero-defects appears to be related to safety and it began in the Marine Corps in 2000 and was later continued by the Department of Defense. In 2000, General James Jones, then the Commandant of the Marine Corps, published an update to his Commandant's Guidance calling for the elimination of avoidable accidents.²⁹ Next, in 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments regarding the reduction of preventable accidents. In this memorandum, Secretary Rumsfeld called for a 50% reduction in preventable accidents, based on the DOD 2002 numbers, by the end of 2008.³⁰ He later increased the reduction goal to 75%. The service departments embraced the challenge with vigor and began initiating policies and directives aimed at decreasing the number of preventable accidents within their respective departments. The idea of a zero-defects mentality is emphasized further by the new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates. In 2007, Secretary Gates also wrote a Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments. This memorandum makes it clear that the expectation is zero preventable accidents, not just the

already expected reduction of 75%. “Our goal is zero preventable accidents, and I remain fully committed to achieving the 75% accident reduction target in 2008.”³¹

The first problem with this task from the Secretary of Defense is that the challenge is filled with “category error.” Category error is a term used to describe a situation when a problem is so poorly defined or stated that the problem is impossible to solve. In this case, the poor description of the problem is related to the term “preventable accidents.” In a 2003 study conducted by the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) entitled *Statistical Analysis of USMC Accidental Deaths*, accidental deaths were divided into three categories: private vehicle, operational, and off-duty recreation.³² The study did not consider accidents related to combat or operational aviation accidents.³³ The term ‘accident’ used by Secretary Gates and the study by the CNA is poorly defined. For example, if a Marine is conducting himself correctly and is killed by another person’s carelessness, the incident will fall under the category of preventable accident. By this logic, the same will hold true for a Marine killed after being struck by lightning. This would fall under the off-duty recreation category for the CNA study and still be viewed as preventable by the Secretary of Defense. The Marines in both examples are not responsible for their deaths, yet would appear in statistical analysis as either preventable or accidental deaths. In the book *Fooled by Randomness*, author Nassim Taleb discusses why humans seek to determine cause and effect relationships for life events. He explains how this “Monday morning quarterback” heuristic or “hindsight bias” makes events appear to be more predictable after the fact than they actually were at the time of their occurrence.³⁴

This leads to the second problem with Secretary Gates’ task of eliminating preventable accidents, namely, that such a goal is statistically unlikely. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), total deaths resulting from motor vehicle crashes

decreased from 15.86 per 100,000 in 1996 to 14.24 per 100,000 in 2006. Additionally, the total number of deaths per year from motor vehicle accidents has remained slightly over 40,000 people during the same time period.³⁵ Although the number of people killed each year per 100,000 individuals has decreased over the past ten years, it demonstrates how difficult it is to eliminate these “preventable accidents,” regardless of policy letters, directives, or laws.

Unpleasant as it may be to think in these terms, the real challenge is to determine an acceptable number of non-combat deaths, or to redefine preventable accident, so that commanders may have an achievable goal to work towards. If no senior military or civilian leader is willing to engage in a discussion regarding an acceptable number of non-combat deaths per year, however disconcerting the conversation may be, then the expectation of achieving zero preventable accidents will simply be another testament to a DOD zero-defects mentality.

Another unintended consequence of this zero-defects mentality relating to the safety of Marines is the perceived need to create a “safety culture” within the military. The idea that safety is paramount is addressed by Colonel Raymond Adamiec in his Chase Prize Essay Contest entry entitled *Safety, Professionalism, and the Marine Ethos*. Throughout the essay, Colonel Adamiec discusses how the profession of arms is an inherently risky business and leaders should not try to convince young Marines otherwise. To do so would be counterproductive and a waste of time. Colonel Adamiec illustrates this point by considering the running of the obstacle course. He contends that if safety was paramount, no one would run the obstacle course because that way no one would get hurt. Although this example may appear extreme, Colonel Adamiec is correct in his logic. Colonel Adamiec’s solution to this problem is to stress professionalism because it is what is paramount.³⁶ The importance of Colonel Adamiec’s observation cannot be overstated because it fully supports the Marine Ethos. Professionalism has always been and will always be a

key part of the Marine Ethos. Safety is important and is a consideration in all Marines do, but it is by no means paramount.

COMMAND CLIMATE: MICROMANAGEMENT

The next part of command climate to be considered is micromanagement. David Bolgiano, an Air National Guard lawyer and former Army paratrooper, has deployed to Afghanistan, Qatar, and Iraq as a legal advisor to Commander, Special Operations Command, and wrote the book titled *Combat Self-Defense: Saving America's Warriors from Risk-Averse Commanders and Their Lawyers*. In the book, Bolgiano claims safety concerns have created a risk-averse attitude within the military.³⁷ This trend of risk-aversion is directly linked to micromanagement because decisions are now being made at higher levels of command than previously. Currently, the decision to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) in Anbar Province, Iraq, rests with the Multi-National Forces-West (MNF-W) Commander, a three-star general in Baghdad. This is the essence of micromanagement during combat operations. To assume someone sitting in Baghdad knows the local threat in some remote village in Anbar better than the platoon or company operating there is counter to decentralized execution.

This sort of presumptuous thinking is touched on by Corporal David Goldich, USMC. Corporal Goldich states, "PPE/ force protection is counterproductive to COIN operations. The latter is, I think, a now widely held view amongst 'experts.' Excessive PPE not only inhibits movement, but it sends the wrong message to locals...Risk mitigation is necessary but excessive and rigid PPE guidelines can hurt more than help."³⁸ This quote, from an actual "strategic corporal," supports David Bolgiano's comments about commanders being risk averse.

Another element of risk aversion is a tendency to think in terms of 'worst case scenarios.' Gunnery Sergeant Russell Miller, USMCR, discusses this subject in his article, "Risk Curves:

Have we included the kitchen sink?" In the article, Gunnery Sergeant Miller claims the Marine Corps still has a zero-defects mentality even after two decades of adhering to MCDP-1

Warfighting. Gunnery Sergeant Miller states,

By continually focusing on disastrous but improbable scenarios we develop unwieldy weapons and skew training away from our primary mission. We do this for genuine concern for Marine lives and mission accomplishment. Yet by preparing for the possible we ignore the probable. We make our poorest choices when a specific knowable risk is pitted against an unknowable one that may ultimately claim many more lives.³⁹

These concerns have been validated. A comment heard in the Marine Corps is, "If [a program, policy, or order] saves one life, it is worth it."⁴⁰ Taken to the extreme, this sort of logic would conclude Marines should not go to the field or train because they may get hurt. Obviously this would be disastrous when the Marine gets to combat, but the qualifier of saving just one life persists.

On the surface, exercising proper judgment would seem to be the obvious solution to determining the balance between the two extremes of probable and improbable events. The trust associated with allowing subordinates to learn good judgment is being degraded. The words of General John Lejeune found in the Marine Corps Manual about special trust and confidence appear to be forgotten.⁴¹ Consider the amount of responsibility placed upon a young corporal serving in Iraq or Afghanistan at this moment. Then consider that on Marine Corps Base Quantico, every person must wear a reflective belt at all times while running on the base, regardless of light conditions or weather. In this case, a Marine's judgment, regardless of rank, is taken away and replaced by an order. This is just a simple example of how far separated some Marine Corps policies are from the realities of what the Marine Corps expects of its Marines.

RISK...A NEW FOUR-LETTER WORD?

Senior officers have explained why safety related policies and orders are more prevalent today than when they were young Marines, and typically it involves the management of risk.⁴² Unfortunately, the meaning of the word 'risk' is unclear due to its frequent use in different contexts. Service members normally recognize risk as part of Operational Risk Management, which is a tool used by the military to identify risks and then determine how to mitigate those risks before taking action. However, not everyone identifies risks the same way and this varying perspective may obfuscate issues between seniors and subordinates. According to Paul Slovic, President of the non-profit organization Decision Research Inc. and a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, "Danger is real but risk is socially constructed. Risk assessment represents a blending of science and judgment with important psychological, social, cultural, and political factors."⁴³ Slovic continues,

Both experts and the public must understand the following: all risk assessment is laden with subjective assumptions, defining risk is an exercise in power as different definitions of risk will lead to different solutions, and different groups within the United States perceive risk differently. Slovic concludes that negotiating acceptable risks within society will require more than providing additional science education; it will involve sharing of power and building of trust among groups.⁴⁴

What does this mean to the Marine Corps? It means that orders, such as the one requiring the use of a reflective belt while running in daylight, may appear sound to a senior officer, but junior Marines are left to wonder why they cannot decide the need for the safety gear themselves. The different perspectives for what is and is not acceptable risk may foster frustration between senior and subordinates, leading to mistrust or micromanagement.

The issue of trust is discussed by Major Michael Grice, a former Leftwich Award Winner, in his essay for the Hogaboom Leadership Writing Contest entitled *A Matter of Trust*.

This essay focuses on the double standard created when a corporal is expected to lead Marines in combat and then return home and place a placard in his barracks window stating he is under the legal drinking age. Grice argues,

Institutionally we have created a culture that emphatically mistrusts our young Marines. [A young leader] must submit to the patronizing oversight of a parochial institution that feels it must save him from himself. This stalwart warrior...must reconcile how he can be a strategic corporal in Al Anbar Province while being given less control over his own life at home than a high school dropout who is pushing slurpees at the local convenience store.⁴⁵

Major Grice's argument is not to question the legal drinking age, but rather to highlight the disparity in trust afforded a young Marine in combat compared to a young Marine in garrison. Put another way, the Marine Corps should trust a Marine to abide by the law in garrison without displaying his age if the same Marine is entrusted with being a leader in combat.

The combination of an over-reliance of risk management with a lack of trust in subordinates can lead to significant problems in combat. Major Grice provides a real world example of this from his experiences in Ramadi, Iraq.

In the spring of 2006 an ORM tool that graphically depicts the threat levels to coalition aircraft in the Iraqi theater of operations was used to redefine areas in which Marine light/attack helicopter (HML/A) squadrons could operate. Although this ORM overlay and corresponding matrix are not formal airspace control measures and were never intended to be used as such, they have become restrictive measures by default. In light of the risks codified by the threat matrix, the decision was made to shift preplanned rotary-wing mission requests in Ramadi to either fixed-wing close air support or to leave them unsourced. Not allowing the maneuver units to plan for, integrate, and rely on HML/As created a gap in the very heart of our maneuver warfare and combined arms doctrine. The removal of Marine Corps attack and utility helicopters from preplanned operations yielded the initiative for action to the insurgent forces.⁴⁶

The events described by Major Grice would appear implausible to an average Marine unfamiliar with the current institutional emphasis on creating a safety culture. Although safety is

important, and policies reflecting safety related issues are well intentioned, there are unintended consequences when those policies begin to have negative impacts on Marines in combat. Unfortunately, this insight is not new. During an interview, Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper, USMC (ret), reflected on a time when he was serving as a company commander in Vietnam. There had been an increase in negligent discharges so the battalion commander issued an order over the radio for every Marine to take their magazines out of their weapons, even though the battalion was outside friendly lines. Van Riper told the battalion commander to command the rifle company if this decision could not be left to the company commander. The battalion commander rescinded the order. The concern over negligent discharges did not end, though. Van Riper said this concern over negligent discharges led to garrison rules in the 1970s that prevented Marines from standing post with their pistols loaded. Ultimately, Van Riper believes this continued fear of the mistakes Marines may make with loaded weapons resulted in Marines standing post in Beirut with unloaded weapons. Consequently, the Marine Barracks was blown up by a terrorist and 241 American servicemen were killed. Meanwhile, the Marine sentry was powerless to stop the explosive laden vehicle because he was not allowed to stand duty with a loaded weapon.⁴⁷ The Marine Corps should not wait for another Beirut to realize risk aversion has gone too far.

HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE, ANYWAY?

The litmus test for successful or unsuccessful strategic corporals is their ability to use sound judgment while making good decisions in a time sensitive and chaotic environment. The decisions our young Marines make and the subsequent actions taken by them and their subordinates will ultimately be evaluated by the world. All leaders distinguish themselves through their decision making—the decision to set a good example, to be moral, to attack the left

flank versus right flank, to shoot or not to shoot—for better or worse. In order to improve the young Marines' decision making ability, it is important to understand how decisions are made. Traditionally, the two general models used to describe the decision making process are: (1) Analytical Decision Making (ADM) and (2) Intuitive or Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM).⁴⁸ The main difference between the two models is the basis of information collected to make the decision. In the ADM method, information is collected and analyzed logically, resulting in a decision related to the probability of success. This process takes time and requires significant amounts of information. Conversely, the NDM describes a process related to decisions being made in naturalistic environments requiring intuition and limited information.

Dr. Gary Klein, a cognitive psychologist, has developed a more specific type of naturalistic decision making model called Recognition-Primed Decision Making (RPD).⁴⁹ Klein defines the RPD model as “fusing two processes: the way decision makers size up the situation to recognize which course of action makes sense, and the way they evaluate that course of action by imagining it.”⁵⁰ Klein conducted his research by examining how firefighters, pilots, nurses, military leaders and others made life-and-death decisions under extreme time pressure.⁵¹ The arena in which Klein studied his subjects is most closely related to the environment in which military members will find themselves making decisions. Improving the strategic corporal's decision making skills is critical for the three block war. To do this, the Marine Corps should heed Dr. Wong's warning (discussed on page 4) of how the wrong environment for transforming the Millennials into innovative thinkers is being created by overly centralized decision making. Improving decision makers under the RPD model will require increasing the depth and breadth of experience for our young Marines by placing them in positions to make decisions without clear guidance or perfect information.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

How does the zero-defect mentality, micromanagement, and obsession with risk mitigation affect decision making? Does the Millennial Generation's propensity towards seeking structure and finding comfort in a 'helicopter parent' environment run counter to the expectations of the strategic corporal's path to success? General Krulak makes the case, "If we know that the effectiveness of intuitive decision making is dependent upon experience, we must seek ways to give our Marines that experience. We must face the paradox that our least experienced leaders, those with the least skill in decision making, will face the most demanding decisions on the battlefield."⁵²

Linking the traits and values of the young men and women joining the military (the Millennial Generation), with the three steps General Krulak describes for cultivating strategic corporals, while maintaining an understanding of the recognition primed decision making model, this paper will highlight some positives and some negatives. On the positive side, the Millennial Generation offers enthusiasm and a willingness to benefit others. They should be able to assimilate to a military environment easily and become good followers. Another positive is that the Marine Corps continues to successfully inculcate young men and women with the Corps' Core Values—honor, courage, and commitment. Also, the Marine Corps remains committed to lifelong learning. Finally, young Marines are learning how to be adaptive leaders through their deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. These factors will all contribute to making them better decision makers for the future.

Conversely, the negative aspects of the Millennial Generation include a need for structure and supervision. There is a perception of a zero-defects mentality and micromanagement within the Marine Corps. Overzealous concerns for safety have resulted in Marines not having the same

trust and responsibility in garrison that they are afforded in combat. There is a potential to lose the experience learned by the current strategic corporals if they choose to leave the Marine Corps out of frustration with garrison policies. According to MPP-50, Marine Corps Exit Surveys from 2001 and 2003 identified leadership quality as an issue. "“Leadership Quality” stayed at #3 on the list of top reasons for [Marines] leaving [the Marine Corps].”⁵³ Additionally, respondents to the Marine Corps Exit Survey for FY 2005 were more dissatisfied with quality of leadership than satisfied with quality of leadership.⁵⁴ To ensure enough Marines reenlist, the Marine Corps is spending \$107.6 million for FY 2007 reenlistment bonuses, more than doubling the \$48 million paid in FY 2005 to meet retention goals.⁵⁵ Money will not always be the answer to retaining Marines.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The Marine Corps should refocus on issues under its control. For example, the Marine Corps cannot change the overbearing nature of helicopter parents, but the Marine Corps can continue to market itself as an organization that values the elite warrior. The Marine Corps can also take steps to improve its command climate. This is not to imply that there are no units within the Marine Corps without a good command climate, but the fact that there are some units with a positive command climate should not keep the casual observer from realizing that zero-defects mentality and micromanagement are a reality. When Marines like Corporal Goldich, a strategic corporal himself, are concerned about returning home because of overbearing rules and regulations,⁵⁶ and when helicopter squadrons fail to provide close air support for ground units because of an ORM matrix, there is a problem. The fix for these problems within the Marine Corps is two-fold: improving leadership and developing a sense of individual responsibility.

LEADERSHIP



Zero-defects. The Secretary of Defense needs to recognize that a goal of zero preventable accidents does not foster an atmosphere of learning and development; but rather an atmosphere of centralization and second-guessing. Safety concerns resulting from the zero-defects mentality need to be put in perspective because there are mixed messages being received. If safety really is paramount and motor vehicle accidents is the cause of most non-combat injuries, then Marines should not be allowed to own private motor vehicles until they turn 25.⁵⁷ If this is too drastic and appears absurd, the same logic would find a goal of zero preventable accidents just as unrealistic. A 2003 CNA study reported, "In general, Marine accidental death rates are below those for civilian males of equivalent age."⁵⁸ The Marine Corps still maintains a lower average of deaths per year than the national average, despite the fact that the Marine Corps has a higher concentration of men and women who are physically active and looking for challenges. If being compared to the national average is not acceptable on one end of the spectrum, and zero accidents is on the other end of the spectrum, then leaders need to make the difficult decision of determining an acceptable number of accidental deaths per year.

Micromanagement. Commanders are centralizing more decisions and erring on the side of caution. Marines should be treated like adults, both in combat and in garrison. *The Marine Corps Manual* clearly defines the special trust and confidence afforded officers, staff non-commissioned officers, and non-commissioned officers.⁵⁹ The Marine Corps should not attempt to save individuals from themselves. Leaders should educate Marines regarding rules and regulations and explain the consequences for not following the rules. Once the subordinates are trained, the leaders should enforce the rules and hold people accountable. It is really that simple. Policies that are nearly impossible to enforce or that erode the trust young leaders were afforded in combat should be eliminated. Essentially, creativity and learning should be encouraged by

seniors of all ranks to ensure young Marines learn how to be strategic corporals in garrison before they are immersed in combat operations.

Risk. Risk needs to be replaced by more specific terms that can be addressed. To say, "A Marine is at risk," does nothing for a commander or for a Marine. However, to say, "A 20 year old male has a higher propensity to drive above the speed limit and therefore is involved in more traffic accidents," will result in a clearer message being sent to Marines about what the important issues are. A scrolling marquee in Camp Lejeune reads, "Risk Takers are Accident Makers." This message needs to stop immediately if the strategic corporal is to understand the nature of risks in combat as MCDP 1 explains them. There is no reason to muddy the importance of understanding risks and how they are related to uncertainty and decision making with an overly simplistic safety campaign that illuminates the danger of risks associated with everyday life events.

Ultimately, Marine Corps leadership should communicate clear guidance through well thought out commander's intent. Some means to this end include the *Marine Corps Gazette*, annual USMC Concepts and Programs publications, MARADMINs, and orders. These are not enough because they do not stress the personal interaction between commander and subordinate. For example, higher headquarters may email a PowerPoint class on safety to subordinate commanders, but this will not replicate the impact of a commander taking the time to visit Marines and spend time with them. Finally, leaders need to discuss frequently the Oath of Office, Oath of Enlistment, and promotion warrants with their Marines. The words expressed in these documents have withstood the test of time and are at the core of the Marine Ethos.⁶⁰

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

In general, leadership is frequently mentioned as the solution to all the problems in the Marine Corps. A former Commandant, Assistant Commandant, MEU commander, and battalion commander all expressed this very idea.⁶¹ True as it may be, leadership, when taken to extremes of what is possible and not possible, presents a double-edged sword. For example, if leadership is the solution to the problems in the Marine Corps—outlined in this paper as a prevalent zero-defects mentality, micromanagement, and risk mitigation to the extreme—and the Marine Corps also considers itself the best led military in the U.S., then why can't the Marine Corps solve this problem of eliminating preventable mishaps? This problem of too many preventable accidents does not exist because of a failure of leadership. Simply put, leadership will not solve every problem because some problems are inherent in every system.

This leads to the second step for improving the Marine Corps' command climate. Individual responsibility needs to be highlighted as the final link with decision making. Leaders are responsible for explaining rules and regulations to Marines, for training and educating subordinates, and for ensuring Marines are prepared to face the challenges of the Marine Corps and life. However, once a Marine is in a position to make decisions, he needs to understand his responsibility. A strong sense of individual responsibility must be imbued in every Marine. This begins at boot camp and officer candidate school, but some of the current policies in the Marine Corps do not further this sense of individual responsibility. Whether it is Marines being told to display placards in their barracks room with their age or the inability of a colonel to decide if a reflective belt is appropriate to wear during an afternoon run, Marines should be enabled to make decisions on their own and commanders should not feel compelled to issue overly restrictive orders to save Marines from themselves.

CONCLUSION

The three block war is a reality. The need for strategic corporals is certain. The Marine Corps claims to be the premier fighting force for America. To support this claim, it is imperative that the Marine Corps continue to recruit strong men and women from society and then develop them into strategic corporals. The primary hindrance to this development is a prevalent zero-defects mentality, micromanagement, and misuse of the word 'risk.' The Marine Corps should hire the CNA to investigate the root causes of these hindrances with a focus on current leadership practices and the Marine Corps' progress in developing the strategic corporal along General Krulak's guidelines. Meanwhile, senior leaders should enforce common sense rules and regulations that have been successful in maintaining a morally strong Corps instead of implementing new directives that only address symptoms. Marines enjoy a high level of trust and responsibility in combat. A similar level of trust and respect should be afforded them in garrison. In this way, young men and women will develop into strategic corporals and lead the Marine Corps to victory in the three block war.

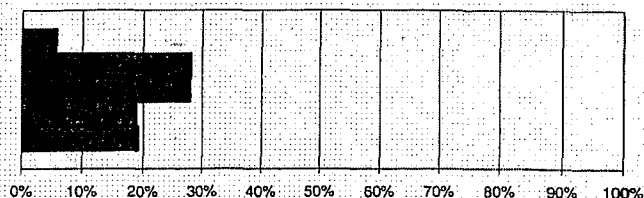
Please circle the number most closely associated with your feelings regarding the statements in the left hand column. For this survey, Operational Risk Management (ORM) is defined as "the process of dealing with risk associated with military operations, including risk assessment, risk decision making and implementation of effective risk controls."

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
1	Marine welfare is more important than mission accomplishment.	5	4	3	2	0
2	The use of ORM is more likely to improve decisions during planning than not using ORM.	5	4	3	2	0
3	ORM is a critical tool for successful combat operations.	5	4	3	2	0
4	The word 'risk' connotes a more positive image than a negative image.	5	4	3	2	0
5	Marine leaders were less likely to consider safety before the implementation of ORM than they are now.	5	4	3	2	0
6	The use of ORM is essential for good decisions to be made during combat operations.	5	4	3	2	0
7	Risk can be categorized as either necessary or unnecessary.	5	4	3	2	0
8	The maneuver warfare mindset has improved through the implementation of more detailed safety programs and orders.	5	4	3	2	0
9	ORM is a critical tool for successful training.	5	4	3	2	0
10	The use of ORM is more likely to improve decisions during execution than not using ORM.	5	4	3	2	0
11	The maneuver warfare mindset is not affected by safety policies, orders, or directives.	5	4	3	2	0
12	Risk mitigation does not lead to risk aversion.	5	4	3	2	0
13	There is a serious problem in the Marine Corps regarding a lack of safety awareness.	5	4	3	2	0
14	There is no "zero-defect" mentality within the Marine Corps.	5	4	3	2	0
15	Risk should be avoided.	5	4	3	2	0
16	The use of ORM is essential for good decisions to be made during training.	5	4	3	2	0
17	Orders, policies, and directives improve judgment and decision making skills better than individual experience.	5	4	3	2	0
Complete the sentence below using one of the words to the right.		Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely	No Opinion
18	Small-unit leaders are _____ provided opportunities to develop their decision-making skills.	5	4	3	2	0

Appendix B

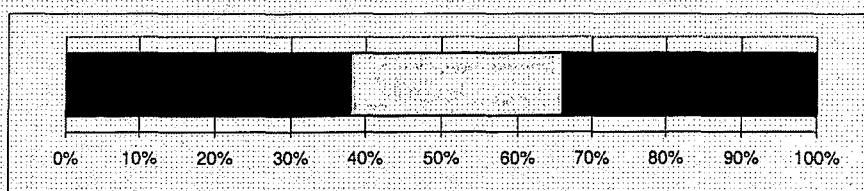
How satisfied were you with each of the following while on active duty: Quality of leadership

1 Very Satisfied	487	5.8%
2 Satisfied	2381	28.2%
3 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	2363	28.0%
4 Dissatisfied	1589	18.8%
5 Very Dissatisfied	1619	19.2%
	8439	



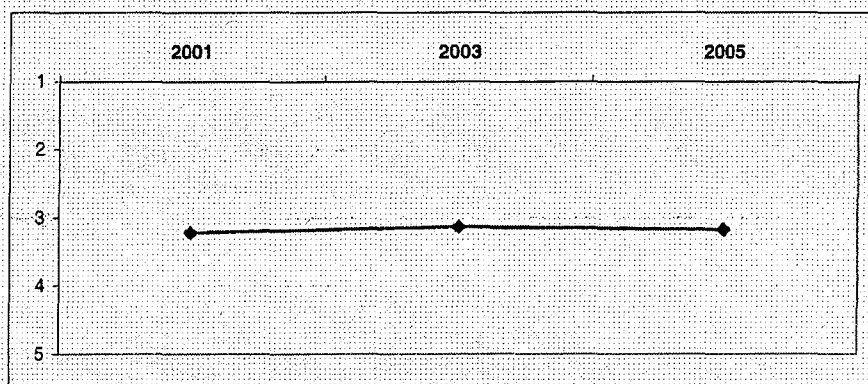
1558 rows have been excluded.

Dissatisfied



Satisfied

Satisfied



Dissatisfied

	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error	95% lo	95% hi
2001	3.218756	1.168554	0.01674	3.185947	3.251566
2003	3.132299	1.175435	0.011538	3.109684	3.154914
2005	3.174428	1.199334	0.013056	3.14884	3.200017

Oath of Office

I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

Oath of Enlistment

I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.

Source: United States Marine Corps, *Leading Marines FMFM 1-0* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1995), 108.

Notes

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- ¹ Charles C. Krulak, "Cultivating Intuitive Decision Making," *Marine Corps Gazette*, May 1999, 18.
- ² Arthur P. Brill, Jr., "Defining the Corps," *Marines*, January 1999, 7.
- ³ Leonard Wong, *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle: SSI, October 2000), 6.
- ⁴ Wong, *Generations Apart*, 6.
- ⁵ Wong, *Generations Apart*, 6.
- ⁶ Wong, *Generations Apart*, 7.
- ⁷ Wong, *Generations Apart*, 7.
- ⁸ Wong, *Generations Apart*, 8.
- ⁹ R. Michael Coffey, Chaplain Ministry to the Millennial Generation (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, March 2006), 2.
- ¹⁰ Coffey, 9.
- ¹¹ Coffey, 9.
- ¹² Jennifer Boen, "'Helicopter Parenting' hurts more than helps: Such parenting impedes child's confidence," *News Sentinel (Fort Wayne, IN)*, 15 January 2007.
- ¹³ Coffey, 9.
- ¹⁴ Leonard Wong, *Stifled Innovation? Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today* (Carlisle: SSI, April 2002), 4-5.
- ¹⁵ Wong, *Stifled Innovation?*, 5-6.
- ¹⁶ Charles C. Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," *Marines*, January 1999, 31.
- ¹⁷ Brill, 7.
- ¹⁸ Brill, 7.
- ¹⁹ Daniel Weidensaul, "Advertising CG In-brief," June 2006, slide 7. This slideshow was presented by the AC/S Advertising, Marine Corps Recruiting Command to the Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruiting Command.
- ²⁰ John Eighmey, "Youth Beliefs and the Propensity to Enlist," March 11, 2004 slide 19. This slideshow was provided to the author by Mr. Daniel Weidensaul.
- ²¹ United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 1500.54A: Marine Corps Martial Arts Program* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 16 December 02), 2.
- ²² United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 1553.4B: Professional Military Education* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 25 January 2008), 2.

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- ²³ Jose E. Guillan, "CAX out, Mojave Viper in: TTECG keeps units ready for OIF deployments," *Marine Corps News*, 30 September 2005. Found online at: <http://www.usmc.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/ac95bc775efc34c685256ab50049d458/b26053d7c63caaab8525708c005fc2b3?OpenDocument>
- ²⁴ Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal," 31.
- ²⁵ Krulak, "Cultivating Intuitive Decision Making," 22.
- ²⁶ The survey was conducted by the author and is found in Appendix A.
- ²⁷ United States Marine Corps, *MCDP 1 Warfighting* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1997), 57.
- ²⁸ Wong, *Generations Apart*, 2.
- ²⁹ James L. Jones, "Commandant's Guidance Update," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 2000, 18.
- ³⁰ Donald Rumsfeld, "Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments," dtd May 19, 2003.
- ³¹ Robert Gates, "Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments," dtd May 30, 2007.
- ³² W. Brent Boning, Michael D. Bowes, and Catherine M. Hiatt, *Statistical Analysis of USMC Accidental Deaths* (Alexandria: Center For Naval Analysis, October 2003), 7.
- ³³ Boning, 5.
- ³⁴ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets* (New York: Random House, 2005), 191-192.
- ³⁵ National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, "Traffic Safety Facts for 2006," "DOT HS 810 809," 2.
- ³⁶ Raymond Adamiec, "Safety, Professionalism, and the Marine Ethos," *Marine Corps Gazette*, September 2004, 62.
- ³⁷ David Bolgiano, *Combat Self-Defense: Saving America's Warriors from Risk-Averse Commanders and Their Lawyers* (Little White Wolf Books, 2007), 105-107.
- ³⁸ Richard Neal, "The Current USMC in Iraq Sitrep-Cpl David Goldich," 29 December 2007, personal email (3 January 2008).
- ³⁹ Russell B. Miller, "Risk Curves: Have we included the kitchen sink?," *Marine Corps Gazette*, August 2007, 46.
- ⁴⁰ There is no official reference for this quote other than the author's personal experience in II MEF. The comment was most frequently used by commanders while explaining a new safety related policy from higher headquarters. Some of the policies leading to these comments include the II MEF Force Preservation Program, Marine Corps Leave Pledge, and the MARFORCOM Seatbelt Pledge.
- ⁴¹ United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Manual with Changes 1-3*, (Washington, D.C.: headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1980), 1-21 – 1-22.
- ⁴² This is based upon the author's experience while having casual conversations with senior officers about safety over the past ten years.

⁴³ "Frontiers," *Controlling Dangers: The Truth About Risk Assessment*, National Science Foundation, 1996, http://www.nsf.gov/news/frontiers_archive/6-96/6dangers.jsp

⁴⁴ "Frontiers"

⁴⁵ Michael D. Grice, "A Matter of Trust," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 2006, 34.

⁴⁶ Michael D. Grice, "Fear of Flying," *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2007, 15.

⁴⁷ Paul Van Riper, interview by Teague Pastel, 31 January 2008.

⁴⁸ D.A. Kobus, S. Proctor, and T.E. Bank, *Decision Making in a Dynamic Environment: The Effects of Experience and Information Uncertainty*, (San Diego: Pacific Science and Engineering Group, August 2000), 1-2.

⁴⁹ Kobus, 2-3.

⁵⁰ Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 24.

⁵¹ Klein, 24.

⁵² Krulak, "Cultivating Intuitive Decision Making," 21.

⁵³ United States Marine Corps, *Comparison of the 2001 and 2003 Marine Corps Exit Surveys –Preliminary Results-MPP-50, M&RA July 13, 2004*, (Quantico, VA, 2004) slide 24.

⁵⁴ FY 2005 Marine Corps Exit Survey from MPP-50, M&RA. A copy of this question and its results may be found in Appendix B.

⁵⁵ United States Marine Corps, *USMC Concepts and Programs 2007*, (Washington, D.C.: Programs and Resources Department, Assessment and Acquisition Branch, HQMC, 2007) 94-95.

⁵⁶ Neal.

⁵⁷ Many insurance companies use 25 years of age as the cutoff for a significant drop in car insurance rates because of the higher propensity of young drivers to get into accidents. For example, the following State Farm Insurance Company website discusses this:
http://www.statefarm.com/insurance/auto_insurance/ins_auto_price.asp

⁵⁸ Boning, 4.

⁵⁹ *Marine Corps Manual*, 1-21 – 1-22.

⁶⁰ A copy of the Oath of Office and Oath of Enlistment are found in Appendix C.

⁶¹ Author interviews with General Charles Krulak, USMC (ret); General Richard Neal, USMC (ret), Colonel Thomas Greenwood, USMC; and Lieutenant Colonel Julian D. Alford, USMC.

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